



## Total force strikes the Pacific

*Staff Sgt. Bobby Yettman  
15th Air Base Wing Public Affairs*

2/10/2003 - **HICKAM AIR FORCE BASE, Hawaii (AFPN)** -- True Air Force airpower was demonstrated at sunset recently over the Hawaiian Islands when two KC-135 Stratotankers from the Hawaii Air National Guard here refueled two Air Combat Command B-1B Lancers.

The tankers from the 203rd Air Refueling Squadron met and refueled the bombers over the Pacific Ocean while the bombers finished up their 19-hour, more than 15,000 mile, global power mission.

After leaving their home at Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D., the two bombers flew to Alaska, where they dropped practice ordnance at a range near Fairbanks. The bombers then flew into Hawaiian airspace where they met the tankers. After refueling, the bombers headed back home.

In a global power mission, an Air Force bomber will take off from its home base, fly anywhere in the world, drop its munitions and return home.

"The true point of this mission is to show that the U.S. Air Force has the ability to put bombs on target anywhere in the world in less than 24 hours," said former B-1 pilot Maj. Eli Eliason, now working for the Pacific Air Forces director of operations.

"We're the only force in the world with this kind of capability," he said. "We have been doing these kinds of long sorties since '95."

On these missions, Eliason said pilots and crew members always train for the worst-case scenario. A combat-experienced pilot himself, Eliason flew B-1Bs into Afghanistan during the early days of Operation Enduring Freedom.

"You never know what to expect on the other end," he said. "We train for everything with our own people, the best-trained Air Force in the world."

Lt. Col. Steve Su'A-Filo, one of the tanker pilots, explained the air bridge contribution with one message.

"The bombers need gas," he said. "We couldn't have global power capability without the refuelers."

During the refueling operation, the planes enter a delicate aerial dance as the bomber matches speed with the tanker and links up with a refueling boom. About 20 feet apart, both planes fly as one, while tens of thousands of pounds of fuel are transferred.

Staff Sgt. Nolan Zoller, a boom operator with the 203rd ARS, said he acts mostly as a safety during the operation, with the majority of the pressure being on the pilot at the other end of the boom.

"The boom is easy to guide," he said. "The pilots have to line everything up and deal with turbulence."

Zoller, the newest boom operator in the squadron, has seen some interesting planes through the back window of the KC-135, his favorite being the B-2 Spirit. He got his chance to refuel the B-2 during a global power mission in December.

"The B-2s were hard to see," Zoller said. "You look right at it, and it's just a line."

Though he appreciates the nature of global power missions, Zoller said he'd prefer to land and refuel

if he were flying into Hawaii.

"(Global power capability) is awesome," he said. "It's unreal to think how long these guys are flying, and then they bypass Hawaii. I would stay." (Courtesy of Pacific Air Forces News Services)